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SUBJECT: SLOVENE PM ADAMANT THAT CROATIA MUST COMPROMISE ON  
EU-ACCESSION ISSUE

Classified By: Ambassador Yousif B.Ghafari, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY. Prime Minister Borut Pahor told the Ambassador January 8 that Slovenia would block Croatia's EU accession negotiations again in February if Zagreb does not demonstrate the will to resolve the issue of the allegedly prejudicial documents submitted by Croatia as part of the accession process. "There will be no change of our position," Pahor said, "absolutely none." Slovenia must receive "a strong confirmation from Croatia that the EU documents in no way prejudice the border issue" if accession negotiations are to move ahead. Pahor made a clear distinction between NATO and the EU, saying that he was optimistic the Slovenian National Assembly would ratify Croatia and Albania's accession to NATO at the end of January. He added that he hoped NATO ratification "would send a strong signal to Brussels and Zagreb." He confirmed that he would meet with Gazprom director Alexei Miller on January 16 to discuss Slovenian participation in the Southstream pipeline. He responded positively to our message on intensified engagement in Afghanistan, but did not make any new commitment. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) Prime Minister Pahor requested a meeting January 8 with Ambassador Ghafari to discuss Slovenia's position on the dispute over Croatia's accession to the EU. Pahor made reference to the non paper and explanatory documents sent to us by the MFA on January 5 (forwarded to EUR/CE and EUR/SCE), saying that Slovenia wants to show that the problem with Croatia is specific and limited. Slovenia recognizes that Croatia should -- and will -- be fully integrated into European institutions. The government will submit Croatia's NATO accession to the National Assembly January 27 for ratification and will work to ensure that it gets the necessary 2/3 majority. Pahor said he discussed the NATO issue with leaders of the parliamentary opposition and he was confident most would vote in favor. The PM said he would likely address the National Assembly himself in order to rally the necessary 61 votes in favor of the treaty. While acknowledging that he will have to expend some political capital, Pahor is optimistic that parliament will approve Croatia's NATO membership by the end of the month. This, Pahor said, "will be great news for everybody."

13. (C) Pahor expressed frustration that Croatian PM Sanader had not responded to his offer to meet and discuss Croatia's EU accession. "I have been waiting three weeks without an answer," Pahor claimed; "Sanader must decide whether he wants to keep up his image in the media or solve the problem." Warming to his subject, Pahor leaned forward for emphasis, saying, "Let me tell you, Mr. Ambassador, if there is not enough will on the Croatian side to solve this problem, we will block their accession again in February. There is no doubt about this." He said he would tell Czech PM Topolanek,

the current EU president, the same thing when the two met later that day. "I am trying to do my best," Pahor said, "but I can't do Croatia's job."

¶4. (C) The Ambassador responded that our policy was to urge both sides to reach an agreement on the immediate issue of Croatia's EU accession, as well as the longer-term border demarcation issue. He reiterated our view that Croatia is part of Europe and should accede to European and Euro-Atlantic institutions. Both sides should stop debating in the media and cooperate to find a bilateral solution. Pahor dismissed Sanader's call for the EU to be present at any talks between Croatia and Slovenia, saying "the EU is not a third party; we need to unblock the bilateral negotiating process and move on."

¶5. (C) Pahor said Slovenia was very concerned about the Russian gas cut-off, but not immediately threatened. (N.B. Slovenia gets slightly more than half its gas from Russia and has a 30-45 day cushion in storage in Austria.) He confirmed that Gazprom chairman Alexei Miller is expected to be in Ljubljana January 16 for long-planned meetings on Slovenia's possible role in the Southstream pipeline. "We will have a chat," Pahor said, "but not more than a chat." He said Europe must find alternative sources of gas or it would become a victim of the Russian-Ukrainian dispute every January. He stated that as a result of the Russian cut-off there was now renewed interest in the Nabucco pipeline.

¶6. (C) Noting the increasing concern about Afghanistan at NATO and in Washington, the Ambassador urged Slovenia to

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field an Operational Mentoring and Liaison Team (OMLT) in addition to the company-sized unit it has stationed with the Italians in Herat. Pahor said that he recognized the importance of training the Afghan security forces. He noted that he had already committed to a formal discussion of the matter with the parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee, but he did not explicitly commit to deploy an OMLT.

¶7. (C) COMMENT. Pahor is in no mood to compromise on Croatia's EU accession. He made it clear that he fears a referendum if his government is seen as backing away from its position that Croatia's EU accession must not prejudice the outcome of the border-demarcation dispute. If the maps we were shown earlier by the MFA are in fact part of Croatia's accession package, Slovenia has a right to be concerned. The maps clearly show disputed border areas as Croatian territory. On NATO, we believe that absent a sharp spike in incendiary rhetoric from either side, Slovenia will ratify Croatia's accession by the end of the month. This should greatly improve the atmosphere for bilateral talks. Were we in Sanader's shoes, we would use the opportunity to claim victory and quietly climb down from the position Croatia has staked out on the maps and other documents submitted as part of its accession package. The U.S. can play a positive role by quietly urging both sides to turn down the rhetorical heat in the lead-up to the NATO vote. Beyond the role of discrete matchmaker, however, there is little to be gained by inserting ourselves into the details of this dispute.

GHAFARI